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Police Carbine Rifles:
A Useful Tool for the White Settlement Police Department?

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Abstract

More and more across the United States law enforcement professionals are confronting assailants armed with high-powered rifles. These heavily armed criminals have the mindset to "shoot it out" with police causing tragic results. Even as this study was being finished a "sniper" is loose on the east coast who has even resorted to firing at children attending school. Traditionally, officers are armed with duty handguns and possibly shotguns. These circumstances can lead to tragedy when an officer faces a suspect armed with a rifle.

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate if designated patrol personnel at the White Settlement Police Department could utilize the carbine rifle, on a limited basis. This project will be presented to the department's administrative staff for review and consideration.

Can the carbine rifle be used as a viable tool by the White Settlement Police Department? Current literature indicates there is a trend by agencies nationwide to adopt the carbine rifle into their arsenals.

Information was compiled for this study from journals, magazines and from the Internet. Figures were obtained on costs to implement the designated rifleman program from law enforcement supply catalogs and from speaking to equipment manufacturing representatives and White Settlement vehicle fleet personnel.

The original intention of this project was to implement the "pistol caliber" carbine rifle. However, during the course of study it was discovered that experts view the .223 caliber type weapons hold a distinct advantage in the field of law enforcement. The patrol rifle carbine is an idea whose time has come. In a time where citizens expect their police to be able to respond to any type of threat, citizens are more likely to want to know why the police don't have long guns instead of why they do.

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature.....	2
Methodology	6
Findings	7
Discussion/Conclusions.....	9
References	

Introduction

On February 28, 1997 a bank robbery and shootout in Los Angeles California brought new light on the effectiveness of common police weapons. Los Angeles police quickly arrived at the scene of the North Hollywood bank and encountered two heavily armed suspects with fully automatic assault rifles. The suspects were also protected by personal body armor. Recognizing they were not equipped to handle the dangerous threat they were facing, officers struggled to find a solution to this deadly situation. Los Angeles police personnel entered a nearby gun store to acquire some rifles to attempt to even out their odds and put a quick end to this tragedy. When S.W.A.T. officers utilizing rifles finally mortally wounded the suspects, 11 officers and 3 civilians had been injured. The suspects had expended over 1200 rounds of ammunition during the violent confrontation with Los Angeles police officers. As a result of the North Hollywood robbery attempt there has been a debate in police departments across the country about the effectiveness of police patrol equipment, more specifically firearms (Williams 1998).

The purpose of this project is to evaluate if the utilization of carbine rifles, on a limited basis, by designated patrol personnel would prove to be a useful addition to the current weapons (handguns and shotguns) already in use by the White Settlement Police Department. Currently White Settlement Police Department officers are restricted from carrying rifles while on routine patrol. The final project will then be submitted to the White Settlement Police Department's administrative staff for review and consideration.

The methods of inquiry for this project should include information obtained from magazines, books, manuals and professional journals as well as information obtained from the Internet.

The intended outcome of this project is to determine the viability of adding the carbine rifle to the existing departmental weaponry and to prove the carbine rifle to be a useful tool to protect the citizens of White Settlement as well as the officers who serve them. The project will include information on budgetary implementation costs (purchase of rifles, vehicle mounting racks and officer training) and also ideas for implementing a new policy regarding the use of the rifles by designated officers.

The implications of this research should show there is a need for the carbine rifle in the urban police environment. Police department administrators must constantly look to the future to see tools that can possibly reduce liability and also serve the purpose of making safer communities for their citizens.

Review of Literature

Can the carbine rifle be utilized as a viable tool by the White Settlement Police Department? Current literature indicates that there is a trend by agencies nationwide to adopt the carbine rifle into their arsenals. Many agencies have taken a hard look at the semi-auto carbine to fill the role of the police support weapon and the concept has been generating considerable interest of late (Boyle 1995). The issue of whether or not to arm patrol officers with semi automatic rifles capable of firing a rifle cartridge or a pistol cartridge is currently being debated by many departments (Williams 1998).

Ever since the infamous North Hollywood shootout in the spring of 1997, there has been a growing concern among police officers that they're perhaps a bit "under gunned" (Taylor 1999). Taylor goes on to state that officers have found themselves in situations where they must be able to engage suspects at greater distances than their traditional weapons (the pistol and

shotgun) will allow. Taylor says that this is why so many departments have opted to carry the carbine rifle.

Weapons selection can be one of the most complicated and controversial issues facing law enforcement administrators today (Pilant 1992). State and Federal laws allow police officers to be armed with rifles and even fully automatic weapons, but the policies in many urban departments prohibit officers from carrying these weapons because of fears of over penetration and extreme range or even concern of "offending" citizens who see these rifles (Unger 2000). Law enforcement agencies that run out and buy rifles to place in a patrol unit without first evaluating the needs of the agency will inevitably fail their ultimate goal: that being the safety of the community and the individual officer (Johnson 1999).

Currently police agencies across the nation are recognizing that the carbine rifle can be useful to fill a void that exists with traditional police weaponry (pistol and shotgun). Some administrators feel there is no need for a rifle because of their misconception that a shotgun can be used to replace a rifle (Pennington 1999). Pennington says that the two weapons should not be considered interchangeable and that both have very different advantages and disadvantages. The shotgun is a proven, useful law enforcement weapon under limited circumstances. No shoulder fired weapon is capable of putting more rounds downrange over a given amount of time with a higher hit probability and greater lethality than a shotgun. The downside to the shotgun is the pattern spread of the shotgun's pellets cause the weapon to be problematic at ranges of 20 yards and beyond (Pennington 1999). The shotgun is also plagued by the increased liability factor of multiple projectiles (usually 9 pellets .32 caliber each in standard 00 buck) coming out of the barrel each time the weapon is fired increasing liability exponentially. Another downside is with shrinking budgets; decreased shotgun training for officers means less familiarity and results in a

greater number of unintentional discharges and other problems with operation (Williams 1998). A shotgun is somewhat more complicated in its function, and is very different than any other police weapon the officer handles regularly. The harsh recoil of the shotgun makes it intimidating to a lot of officers and makes them reluctant to utilize the weapon even when it's called for.

The weaknesses of the shotgun are, for the most part, the rifle's greatest strengths (Johnson 1999). In his book "Police Rifles" (1994), Richard Fairburn states that the rifle's ability to engage a target at medium to long range while maintaining its terminal ballistics is one of the most appealing features of the rifle. He goes on to say that officers are more comfortable with a rifle because it allows more precision and has less abusive recoil than the shotgun. The comfort factor promotes increased training and familiarity that will improve the officer's confidence. Each time the trigger is pulled, only one round is fired. With proper training, the rifle's accuracy coupled with a single shot being fired for each trigger pull, reduces the potential risk of liability to the officer and the agency (Johnson 1999).

Currently the types of rifles being used by police agencies for patrol officers can be classified into two different types. The first is the military type, detachable magazine fed 5.56 X 45 (.223 caliber) semi-automatic rifle. Examples of this rifle are the Colt AR-15 (available in many variants), Ruger Mini-14, H&K 53,93 and G36. The second type is fairly new to the marketplace or at least police usage. These rifles utilize cartridges that were primarily used for pistols (hence the name pistol caliber carbine) and are also detachable magazine fed. Examples of this rifle are the Ruger PC9 (9mm), Ruger PC4 (.40 caliber), Marlin Camp Carbine (available in 9mm and .45 caliber) and the H&K USC (.45 caliber). Once again with two different types of

rifles, there is a question as to which one would be the better tool for the White Settlement Police Department.

Although administrators must certainly consider the public's perception of rifles issued to their officers, experience in Europe reveals that people will adapt to new weapons, especially if they contribute to a safer community (Huntington 1997). Carbines and rifles suitable for patrol duty may differ considerably from similar arms used by the tactical specialist. For a patrol function, optical sights are an unnecessary option and probably a liability if the weapon is locked in a vehicle rack. Likewise, full auto capability is neither needed nor desirable (Boyle 1995). The current trend in available literature shows that more agencies seem to be adopting the use of the "military style" .223 rifles than their more traditional looking pistol caliber counterparts.

Roy Huntington the Executive Editor for Police Magazine conducted a Website survey, "Top Picks In Patrol Rifles" and the results were shown in the September 2001 issue. This survey indicated that the .223 rifles were clearly used more than any other caliber of rifle. The survey also indicated that the Colt AR and variants held the top spot as the rifle of choice with the Ruger Mini-14 coming in second. Huntington was surprised that some officers were utilizing AK-47 variants, SKS's (chambered in 7.62 X 39 caliber) and even lever action Winchester 30 30's.

Certainly another issue that must be considered is how the rifles could be effectively implemented in the department. Current literature lists an idea called the "Designated Rifleman Program". This is a program where rifles are issued to certain selected officers. Those officers are then responsible for the care and upkeep of the weapon and also for keeping their skills with that weapon sharp and proficient. A policy model titled "Policy Guidelines for the Police Patrol Rifle" written by Thomas J. Aveni (1998) was located on the Internet. The policy model

contained ideas for implementation and continuation of the designated rifleman program. As with any agency "use of force" option the policies and guidelines must be clear and concise on their deployment and usage.

Methodology

Can the carbine rifle be implemented as used as an effective and useful tool at the White Settlement Police Department? Certainly experts and even laymen in the field of law enforcement can see a void in the current weaponry being utilized by police agencies across the country. We live in a time where the public expects its police departments to be prepared for whatever type of tragedy or critical incident that can occur. All across our nation agencies are discovering that the carbine rifle is a useful tool to fill the void that currently exists with the traditional police pistols and shotguns. That void exists at the White Settlement Police Department as well as many of the other departments in the Dallas, Fort Worth metropolx and surrounding areas. I believe that the White Settlement Police Department and its community would benefit from the adoption of the police carbine rifle implemented by using the Designated Rifleman Program.

Several experts and practitioners in law enforcement have written about the carbine rifle. Information was compiled and studied from journals, magazines and from the Internet. As with any projects in a small municipality the cost is a major issue. Figures were compiled on the cost of implementing the carbine rifle by utilizing current law enforcement equipment catalogs. The City of White Settlement's Fleet Services Director was contacted to get figures on the cost of mounting rifle racks in the patrol units. Training costs had to be estimated by figuring range time per officer.

All of the information compiled will be submitted to the Chief of Police for review and consideration. Currently the police department has the opportunity to approach the Crime District Board for full or partial funding for such projects.

Findings

Clearly the majority of current information available about the carbine rifle indicates that it has a very positive role to play in the modern law enforcement arena. In today's times, especially after the events of September 11, 2001 where terrorists brought a whole different school of thought to the American public, citizens expect their police to be ready to respond to all different levels of threats or situations that can present themselves. It is plain to see that different approaches and tactics must be developed by law enforcement to ensure the safety of their citizens and their police officers.

At the onset of this research project it was my intention to implement the use of pistol caliber carbines at the White Settlement Police Department. The pistol caliber carbine offers two performance advantages over the traditional handgun: improved ballistics and greater accuracy (Lesce 1997). Lesce also stated that the shoulder weapon provides increased accuracy, even with iron sights, especially at longer ranges. The longer sight radius and three-point support combine to promote better shot placement. Both enhancements combine to provide a weapon that delivers practical accuracy out to 100 yards or more, depending on the skill of the shooter.

The pistol caliber carbine also has a ballistic advantage over the traditional handgun. The longer barrel of the carbine allows it to achieve higher muzzle velocities than the pistol. The value of the carbine is not that it expels the handgun bullet at a greater velocity, but it increases the practical accuracy and range of the department's handgun rounds. The pistol caliber should be carefully evaluated both for what it is and what it is not. It is not a rifle or a shotgun

substitute; it is a user-friendly defensive tool that increases the patrol officer's usable accuracy and range (Pollack 2001).

While reviewing the research on the pistol caliber carbines it became apparent that an abundance of agencies were adopting the military style .223 weapons. The main reason was the .223 bridged the gap over traditional police weapons better than its pistol caliber counterparts. The .223 is far more effective and destroys more tissue than the 9mm. Utilization of the more powerful cartridge will typically bring hostiles to a halt quicker, reducing the need to fire additional rounds and thus minimizing the risk to the public and officers (Boyle 1995).

When this study began a misconception existed that the .223 would be much more dangerous to use in a populated area than a weapon chambered for the 9mm. Studies conducted by the Gunsite Training Center, Mesa Arizona Police Department, FBI and others illustrate that this is not always the case. The .223 does have a much greater wounding potential than the 9mm and in the event that it strikes human flesh, the likelihood of killing or seriously wounding is that much greater. The .223 is likely to break up or fragment when it strikes a hard surface, while the 9mm has a greater potential to ricochet, with the bullet almost entirely intact. Tests conducted by the Gunsite Training Center show that the .223-softpoint and hollowpoint ammunition are less likely to penetrate the exterior walls and enter into a home than the commonly utilized 147-grain 9mm subsonic ammunition (Boyle 1995).

Most experts agreed that officers could be trained to accept the rifle more readily than the shotgun. The rifle has a similar function to the semi-automatic pistol that most officers currently carry. The rifle is loaded with a detachable magazine and also has a traditional sighting system that is absent on most shotguns. The rifle also has much less recoil than the 12-gauge shotgun chambered with standard 00 buckshot shells.

Certainly in the municipal police environment the cost of implementation of the Designated Rifleman Program is a major concern. Although cost is of high priority, the quality of weaponry being purchased must be considered a higher priority. Heckler & Koch (H&K) is one of the highest rated weapons manufacturers for military and law enforcement in the world. According to Nasser (Personal communication, October 7, 2002) who is a representative of H&K, the White Settlement Police Department could purchase 8 H&K G36K .223 rifles for \$8,504 (rifle slings and one 30 round magazine included). Nasser also quoted for-stock lights (integrated lighting system) for the 8 rifles for \$1,440. According to Mark Price (Personal communication October 7, 2002) who obtains and installs equipment into the White Settlement Police Departments vehicle fleet, the locking racks to mount the H&K G36K into the inside of 8 patrol cars would cost approximately \$1,600 and the labor would be \$800 to install.

Ammunition costs for training 8 officers for 1 year was obtained by computing average prices from law enforcement supply catalogs. 8,000 rounds (1000 rounds per officer per year) of .223 ammunition would cost \$1,200 per year. Payroll training costs were figured by allocating 20 hours of overtime at \$30 an hour per officer per year. The total cost would be \$4,800 per year to the White Settlement Police Departments payroll. The total for the above listed items is \$19,136. To maintain the program yearly after the initial expenditure for equipment would be approximately \$6,000 per year for officer pay and ammunition costs.

Discussion/Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate if the utilization of carbine rifles, on a limited basis, by designated patrol personnel would prove to be a useful addition to the current weapons (handguns and shotguns) already in use by the White Settlement Police Department.

Administrators must constantly look ahead to see current trends in the field of law enforcement and act to ensure the safety of their citizens and their personnel.

The hypothesis for this research was that it would prove the carbine rifle a viable tool for the White Settlement Police Department. Initially, it set out to prove the viability of implementing the use of the pistol caliber carbine into the department's arsenals. However, during the course of the research it was discovered that the .223 caliber rifle would be a much better option for the White Settlement Police Department.

Concern about the over penetration of the high-powered .223 round was dispelled by testing done by other researchers with new "frangible" ammunition developed for .223 caliber law enforcement weapons. Certainly the increased accuracy that the .223 style weapon has over the traditional handgun should ease an officers mind if he ever faces that dreadful decision of having to make a shot on a suspect that is attempting to take his or someone else's life.

Almost all literature available about the carbine patrol rifle favored its use and implementation. It was difficult to find any information to the contrary. A common theme throughout the study was the fact officer's need to be trained and proficient with any weapon they are issued. Certainly with a weapon as potent as a .223 the training issue would be of ut most importance to limit liability and to ensure the safety of the citizens.

The lack of negative information about the carbine police rifle was the only limitation of this study. Certainly with the amount of carbine police rifles already in use, if there were any glaring discrepancies or problems they should have surfaced and been documented. As with the implementation of anything it is beneficial to know of problems or pitfalls that might arise before they happen to you or your agency.

On April 24, 2002 White Settlement Police officers received a call that a crazed gunman was holding a woman hostage. A short time after the officers arrived shots rang out. After those shots were fired Captain George Scott Monier, a 12 year veteran of the White Settlement Police Department crawled out through the front door of the residence he had been in trying to save a woman's life. Multiple .45 caliber rounds had shredded his body and he was struggling to breath. Officers ran to his aid placing themselves in danger of the assailant that had just shot Captain Monier. Those officers carried him to safety and began trying to stop the profuse bleeding through his many wounds. A short time later Captain Monier was rushed to the hospital as a perimeter was being set up around the scene of the tragedy. Captain Monier died a short time later leaving two daughters, a *wife* and a community heartbroken. Later, Fort Worth SWAT discovered that the assailant had also been killed during the gun battle.

At the onset of the terrible tragedy that occurred on April 24, 2002 the gunmen had come out into the front yard of his residence and engaged officers with a pistol. Officers were too far away to safely engage the suspect with their traditional police handguns. This situation indicates that a patrol carbine rifle could have certainly been a life saving tool on that tragic day in White Settlement.

The patrol carbine rifle should certainly not be considered the ideal tool for all deadly force situations. The patrol rifle definitely is a tool that can be used by properly trained officers to stop a deadly confrontation from a reasonable distance. The patrol rifle carbine is a concept whose time has come and merits evaluation and implementation into the patrol fleet of the White Settlement Police Department.

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